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BROWN WILLIAM
THE POWER OF THE HARP
AND
OTHER BALLADS

BY
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :
PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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BROWN WILLIAM

This ballad was written in consequence of the execution of William Christian, generally called William Donn, or Brown William, from the darkness of his complexion, who was shot at Hango Hill, near Castletown, in the Isle of Man, shortly after the Restoration, for alleged treason to the Derby family, who long possessed the sovereignty of Man. . . . The ballad of "Brown William," which gives an account of the betrayal of the poor patriot, and the vengeance taken by the hand of God upon his murderers, is the most popular of all the wild songs of Ellan Vannin.

LET no one in greatness too confident be,
Nor trust in his kindred, though high their
degree ;
For envy and rage will lay any man low :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Thou wast the Receiver of Mona's fair state,
Thy conduct was noble, thy wisdom was great,
And ne'er of thy rule did she weariness show :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Thy right hand was Earley, and Theah thy right
eye ;

Thy state caused thy foemen with rage to swell
high ;

And envy and rage will lay any man low :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

How blest thy condition in fair Ronaldsway !

Thy mansion, how stately ! thy garden, how gay !

But oh ! what disasters from envy do flow :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

'Twas said at thy trial, by men void of faith,

The king, by a letter, demanded thy death ;

The jury was frighten'd, and dared not say "No !"

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

The clan of wild Colcad could ne'er be at rest

Whilst the race of Christeen their own acres
possess'd ;

And envy and spite will bring any man low :

Thy murder Brown William, fills Mona with woe.

A band of adulterers, curst and unholy,
For Ronaldsway lust, as they did for Lough
Molley ;
Of Naboth, the tragedy's played here anew :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Not one of the band but received his just meed,
Who acted a part in that damnable deed ;
To dwindle away the whole band was not slow :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

To Callaghyn-doo, and to Vannyster roam,
And call on the Colcad till hoarse ye become ;
Gone, gone is the name so well known long ago :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

A cripple was Robin for many years long,
Who troubled and bullied the island when strong ;
His own friends of tending him weary did grow :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Sly Richard took ship with thy blood on his
hand,

But God can avenge on the sea as on land ;

The waves would not bear him, but whelm'd
him, I trow :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

And now, if a few of the seed do remain,

They're vile as the thistles and briars on the
plain ;

They ply for their neighbours the pick and the
hoe :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Should ye walk through all Man you'll find no
one, I reckon,

To mourn for the name that was once in
Beemachan ;

But thousands of poor who rejoice that 'tis low :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Proceed to Creganyn, and Balla-logh green,
But where's there a Colcad to bid ye walk in ?
By strangers their homes and their lands are
held now :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

Great Scarlett, in wealth who dwelt down by the
bay,

Must toil now with paupers for sixpence a-day ;
And oft, as I've heard, has no morsel to chew :

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

The band by whose weapons the great Cæsar
died

Were hunted by foes, and all peace were denied ;
Not one died the death of kind Nature, O, no !

Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
woe.

So it fared with the band by whom Willie did
die,

Their lands are a waste, their names stink to the
sky ;

They melted like rime in the ruddy sun's glow :
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
 woe.

But comfort I take, for 'tis common report
There are shoots of dear Will who are sitting at
 court,
Who have punished his foes by king's mandate,
 although
Thy murder, Brown William, fills Mona with
 woe.

O, 'tis pleasant to think, when one's wither'd and
 grey,
There's race of Brown William in fair Ronalds-
 way,
That his foemen are crush'd, and their faces can't
 show,
While the clan of Christeen have no trouble or
 woe.*

* Here the old ballad—I speak of the original Manx—concludes. The two following stanzas are comparatively modern.

To the counsellors false, both in church and in
state,
Bear the public of Mona both loathing and hate,
Who set man against man, and the peace would
break now,
As thy murder, Brown William, broke hearts
long ago.

The lord of our island, Duke Athol the great,
They would gladly persuade, with their parle
and their prate,
The corner-stones high of his house to lay low,
And to King, Duke and Mona are foemen, I
trow.

THE POWER OF THE HARP

SIR PETER would forth from the castle ride,
Grieving and weeping did sit his young bride.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“ Art grieving for saddle, or steed black or white,
Or because I have wed thee art thou in this
plight ? ”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“ I grieve not for saddle, or steed black or white,
Nor because thou hast wed me am I in this
plight.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“Dost sorrow because little wealth I have got,
Or dost sorrow because thine equal I'm not?”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

“I sorrow not because little of wealth thou hast
got,
Nor grieve I because thou mine equal art not.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

“Dost sorrow because thy fond father is dead,
Or dost sorrow because thou'rt no longer a
maid?”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

“I grieve not because my dear father is dead,
Nor sorrow I because that I am not a maid.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

“I grieve and I weep, and to grieve I have need,
I know but too well what for me is decreed.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

“For the bridge, the broad bridge, I sorrow much
more,

For oh ! my five sisters together fell o’er.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“I think of the stream, and I sorrow much more,
My sisters sank in it and never rose more.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“My dearest, my dearest, cast sorrow aside,
Before thee shall twelve of my merry men ride.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“Before thee shall twelve of my merry men
speed,

And I will myself hold the reins of thy steed.”

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

And when they arrived in the green forest shade
A hart they beheld at gold tables that played.

*Belov’d of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

All stopped at the strange brown hart to take
 heed,

And allowed the young bride by herself to pro-
 ceed.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
 so ?*

And as the broad bridge she went galloping o'er,
Stumbled her steed on his golden shoes four.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
 so ?*

Golden shoes four, each with golden nails three,
And the bride was cast into the boiling sea.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
 so ?*

Sir Peter he turned at her terrified cry,
But the bride she had sunk 'neath the waters
 high.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
 so ?*

He called to his men as their hands they wring :
"Bring quickly my harp with the golden string !"

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
 so ?*

Sir Peter began with such sweetness to play,
That the birds all sang as they sat on the spray.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

The Merman rose from the depths of the sea,
And the fair young bride by the hand led he.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“ Sir Peter, Sir Peter, thy playing give o'er,
Thy beautiful bride to thy arms I restore.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

“ For my bonny bride only I will not give o'er,
Her five sisters also thou must restore.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

Anew 'gan Sir Peter so sweetly to play,
That the birds came down from their seat on the
spray.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so ?*

The Merman arose from the depth of the sea,
Five pretty maids by the hand led he.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

“Sir Peter, Sir Peter, thy playing give o'er,
For in truth have I now no maidens more.”

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

From her anguish now is the Lady free,
In the arm of Sir Peter each night sleeps she.

*Belov'd of my heart, wherefore sorrowest thou
so?*

THE UNFORTUNATE MARRIAGE

HILDEBRAND gave his sister away,
Causing her many a mournful day.

She was given away and evilly wed,
Joy from her bosom quickly fled.

On Sunday she was a graceful bride,
On Monday a prisoner sad she sigh'd.

“ O what, my Lord, have I done to thee ? ”

“ Woman, I had no gold with thee.

“ This have I, Dame, to say to thee,
Thou brought'st no silver home to me.”

“ Thou knowest I brought thee as my dower
Eight full coffers to thy bower.

“ Two filled with silver, white to see,
And two with gold so ruddy of blee.

“ Two filled with sable and mard skins rare,
And two with pelts of deer and of bear.

“ Upon thy father I bestow'd
Gilded saddle and courser proud.

“ Upon thy mother did I bestow
Scarlet to place her feet below.

“ To thy brother a ship from off the wave,
To your sister gold from my breast I gave.

“ All thy courtiers I have dight
With little shirts as ivory white.

“ No serving lass in the house is there
But I gave her silk to snood her hair.

“ With what, my Lord, canst me upbraid,
And why in durance am I laid ? ”

“ Woman, to thee I've this to say,
Thy brothers my father slew in fray.”

“ If my brothers a deed so dire did dare,
I in that deed did in no ways share.

“ And thou for thy father’s death wast paid
Seven tons of silver, and golden braid.

“ What more, my Lord, canst thou require,
To remove from me thy anger dire ? ”

“ Woman, with this I thee upbraid,
Thou cam’st not into my bed a maid.”

“ So lend me, God, in my trouble aid,
As I came into thy bed a maid !

“ And may God never give me grace,
If I came not a maid to thy embrace.”

“ To-day thou shalt sit within and mourn,
To-morrow at dawn on faggots burn.”

There she sits and her hands she wrings,
Till she heard the clang of the Raven’s wings.

“ O Raven, Raven, stay thy wing,
Can’st thou the tune of the watchman sing ? ”

“ O well can I, and well I ought,
So little was I when the tune I caught.”

“ Wilt fly for me, Raven, to Tonne town,
For there my friends and kindred wone ?

“ I’ll give thee, Raven, a red gold band,
To carry my message to Hildebrand.

“ A red gold band I’ll give to thee,
To tell him the tale of my misery.”

“ Thy gold will do me little good,
Dearer to me my raven food.”

“ O Raven, if thou wilt fly for me,
My husband’s eyes shall be thy fee.”

Abroad his black wings the Raven threw,
And over three kingly realms he flew.

The Raven into the chamber sped,
Where Hildebrand drank the wine so red.

“ Hear thou, Hildebrand the young,
Thy sister’s into durance flung.

“ Here art thou sitting and drinking wine,
To-morrow they’ll burn sweet sister thine.”

Hildebrand sprang the table o’er,
Dashing the wine on the marble floor.

Hildebrand hies him into the stall,
There he beholds the coursers all.

He viewed the brown, and the gray as well,
On the black he laid the gilded selle.

“ Blacklille, Blacklille, if me thou’lt bear,
Thou on winnowed wheat all thy days shalt fare.”

“ Then willingly, willingly, thee I’ll bear,
But to breathe my name thou must not dare.”

He placed himself Blacklille’s back upon,
And across the sea then away he ran.

And when to the midst of the Sound they came,
He in evil hour uttered Blacklille’s name.

Blacklille quickly swam to the land,
But down to the bottom sank Hildebrand.

On the Ting stood the damsel at break of day,
Then heard she afar off Blacklille neigh.

Blacklille ran towards the Ting in wrath,
Back scattered both women and men from
his path.

Blacklille he kicked, the Raven he hewed,
With the blood of men was his beak embrued.

Black took on his back the fair young dame,
He went from the Ting and with her was tame.

And when they reached the yellow sand,
Upon it was standing Hildebrand.

"Welcome, sweet Kirsten, dear sister mine,
Why is so pallid that cheek of thine?"

"The reason my cheek so pale is seen,
Is because I've far from my dear home been."

"Now let no honest man," she said,
"Into foreign lands his daughter wed.

"Of gold perhaps he may get a store,
But her happiness goeth for evermore."

Hildebrand kissed her o'er and o'er :

"My darling sister, pray sorrow no more.

"Kirsten, I pray thee, pardon me
For bringing thee into this misery."

Then spake Blacklille as he stood :

"I've saved thee by shedding human blood.

"Give me, Kirsten, one little kiss,
And the Raven one on that beak of his."

On their mouths she kissed them both with
glee—

From hideous thrall were they both set free.

She kissed them both with good will, I ween,
They changed to her brothers who lost had
been.

They all pressed her fondly to their breast,
From sorrow and woe she is now at rest.

THE WRESTLING-MATCH

As one day I wandered lonely, in extreme
distress of mind,

I a pleasant garden entered, hoping comfort
there to find.

Up and down I paced the garden till an open
space I spied,

There I saw a crowd of people, and I heard a
voice that cried :

“ Come and see what Love is doing, here is Love
performing more

Wondrous feats than e'er were witnessed at
Olympian games of yore :

This he conquers, that he conquers, young and
old before him lie,

Great and small alike he conquers, none with
him a fall must try.

Hearing this at once I entered 'midst the crowd
collected there,
Some of whom no doubt were eager like myself
to banish care.
I would fain behold this being, this same
wondrous lad survey,
Who 'twas said in each encounter bore with ease
the prize away.
Quickly I the crowd divided, soon I pierced the
multitude,
And this Love stood full before me, and what
think you 'twas I view'd?
Why a boy, a little darling, full of captivating
grace,
Rather roguish were his glances, but how lovely
was his face !

Soon as I beheld this warrior gibings I began to
throw
At the wretches who had suffered fell defeat
from such a foe.

Then, to me his visage turning, of the conquered
standing by

One replied, and in replying tears he shed
abundantly :

“ O, poor youth,” ’twas thus he answered, “ little,
little dost thou know

That in coming here thou comest not to joy,
but bitter woe.

Tears, and pains, and wounds most ghastly,
wounds for which there is no cure,

Every kind of evil treatment such as no one can
endure.”

When these words I heard him utter I was filled
with bitter rage,

And forthwith made preparation with the warrior
to engage.

“ Harken, Master Love,” I shouted, “ from this
spot stir not away,

You and I must have a battle, must engage in
deadly fray ;

'That it may be known for certain which is
strongest of us two."

Then into the arena bounding there I stood in
all men's view,

In the midst of it expecting firm the onset of
the foe,

Doubting not should he attack me him at once
to overthrow.

Love he was not slow to follow with a blythe
and joyous air,

Crying out, "My dearest fellow, for the fight
yourself prepare!

Round the waist each other clasping now let's
strive like wrestlers true,

Do your best and I will show you what young
Master Love can do."

Then around the waist I clasped him, he his
arms around me wound,

Long we hugged and hugged each other, each
his match in t'other found.

Said at length the urchin to me : “ Sadly tired,
friend, am I,
Very much fatigued and weary, really friend
just fit to die.
Therefore take from me, I prythee, what thou
anxiously hast sought,
And for which in this arena with me gallantly
hast fought.”

Then a blast of wild consuming fire he breathed
into my breast,
Straight my breast it quick enkindled, all
deprived was I of rest,
Then he ran away exulting to some other
wretched wight,
Such a zest he has for conflict, in such fray is
his delight.

As for me I fell half senseless on the fatal, fatal
spot,
Fierce consuming fire within me, never sure was
one so hot.

Rising up I followed shrieking, "Oh have
mercy, Love, on me !

See my tears, my sad affliction, cure me of my
misery !"

Then he cried, "Dost not remember all the
boasts thy lips out-pour'd ?

Know henceforth in every region Love is
Conqueror and Lord."

Thus he cried, and proudly left me, and wherever
now I rove,

I reproach myself for thinking I could vanquish
mighty Love.

THE WARRIOR

From the Arabic.

THOU lov'st to look on myrtles green,
And the narcissus bright of hue ;
I love the blaze of sabres keen,
I love the dagger's flash to view.

Thou, thou may'st drink the rosy wine
From golden goblets sculptured o'er ;
From foemen's skulls the joy be mine
To drink my foemen's reeking gore.

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